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What a Spy Book!

"The Philby Conspiracy," by Bruce Page, David Leitch and Philip Knightley. (Doubleday: \$5.95, 300 pp.)

When the subject is espionage, sometimes fact is a great deal more exciting than fiction. The proof lies in this remarkable book, written by three members of the staff of the London Sunday Times. Rarely has there been a better job of reporting. Any critic who observes that a book is so enthralling one cannot put it down is certain to be accused of triteness, but in the case of *"The Philby Conspiracy,"* it is the only adequate phrase. This is a genuine thriller.

Harold (Kim) Philby was one of the most esteemed members of British intelligence, an authority on Communist tactics and Communist conspiracies.

He should have been, for secretly he was a Communist, and every British or American secret he learned was promptly passed on to Moscow. He was under suspicion by a few individuals for a long time, and the tragedy is that those who suspected him were universally laughed off: he was too well-born, too charming, too much a part of the so-called Establishment indoctrinated in the ways of a gentleman at Westminster and Cambridge. He was also the mentor of those two notorious and elegant traitors, Donald Maclean and Guy Burgess.

It was Philby who tipped off Burgess and Maclean, enabling them to flee to Russia. (Departing England, they left the keys in their car at the ferry dock. When a sailor called to them, they called back: "We'll be back on Monday.") In turn, his own flight was triggered by another tipoff. The British had captured George Blake, a Russian spy in England

for 10 years. He supplied the last bit of information necessary to damn Philby wholly.

But wait. Did the British bring him back in manacles from Beirut, where he was the correspondent of the London Observer? It would have seemed logical, but they didn't. The first whispers of the Profumo affair were penetrating Parliament, forewarning of a first-class political scandal. The Conservative government did not want another. The decision was made "to frighten Philby into defecting," and it worked.

How he got to Moscow will never be known unless Philby chooses to talk. The authors suspect he has kept silence to protect friends, not involved in espionage, who helped him to escape. They believe he used forged papers identifying him as a Turkish courier, made his way to the Russo-Turkish border and crossed on foot. He knew that wild, mountainous country well.

The exact extent of the damage done by Philby doubtless will be revealed at some distant day, when it will not damage the Soviet espionage apparatus. By common agreement among those high up both in the CIA and the British SIS, it was tremendous. Burgess and Maclean, pitiable drunkards and malcontents, made a great deal more noise, but it was Kim Philby who pulled the strings.

He can be described simplistically as a traitor, and that he was. He can be described in a more complex fashion as a man who felt that western democracy was rotten and deserved to be destroyed. He has described this book as "the truth, in part." It may be a great deal more of the truth than he fancied ever would come to light. It bears the marks of detailed research to a level rarely attempted by a newspaper. Rarely if ever has a jigsaw puzzle had so many pieces, and rarely if ever

has that puzzle been put together with so few pieces apparently missing.



Harold Philby